

THE TROP REPORT

Official Dispatch of the Tampa Bay Devil Rays · "A New Ballclub in the Sunshine State"

RECORD: 58-79 (.423)

5TH, AL EAST · 24 GB

PRICE: ONE THIN DIME

McGriff Locked Up Through 2002 as Rays Break Even in August, Then Lose Five Straight to Land at 58-79

A 15-15 stretch, with Franco at .380 and Hernandez at a 0.90 ERA, ends with a doubleheader sweep at Detroit, Bubba Trammell on the DL until late September, and 25 games left

BY RAY DELGADO · TROP REPORT STAFF WRITER

The Rays went 15-15 over the 30 games since the last edition of this paper went to press — 14-15 on the August calendar, plus a 4-3 win over Detroit on July 31 that was played after our deadline — and still lost ground, because everyone ahead of them did better. Tampa Bay sits at 58-79, 24 games behind Toronto in the AL East, with 25 left to play. The club scored 144 runs and allowed 143 over those 30 games, so the record is exactly what the run differential says it should be: a .500 team living inside a .423 season. Home cooking was 10-8; the road was 5-7.

The biggest news came off the field. On August 4 the club signed first baseman Fred McGriff, 34, to a four-year extension through 2002 worth \$22.25 million in all, taking his name off the winter table. He answered at once: .286 with 11 home runs and 23 RBI over the stretch, which lifts his season line to .287 with 31 home runs and 82 RBI.

"Fifteen and fifteen is not a rebuild, but it is a pulse."

There was plenty to enjoy. John Flaherty went 6-for-6 with a home run in a 17-3 romp at Kansas City on August 13, the second-biggest scoring night of the Rays' season behind May 28's 20, and Tony Coles got the win. Rolando Arrojo shut out Baltimore 2-0 on August 11 and went 3-0 with a 3.33 ERA in five August starts. Dennis Springer beat Cleveland 13-4 on the 9th, and Wilson Alvarez ended the month with a 5-1 win at Minnesota on the 31st, his fourth win of the stretch.

The finish was another matter. From August 26 through 30 the Rays lost five in a row — 7-1 and 9-0 to Minnesota at the Trop, 2-1 at Detroit, then a doubleheader sweep, 6-4 and 6-2 — and scored 8 runs in the five games. An earlier low point was a 14-4 loss to Chicago on August 3. Bubba Trammell, who was hitting .348 with seven home runs in 11 games, went on the DL August 16 with about 21 days on the injury report, which points to a return around September 21; McCracken and Morman cover right field. Rosters can expand to 40 starting today, though the front office is holding call-ups unless an injury forces one.

BY THE NUMBERS

15-15

Since the July issue: 10-8 at home, 5-7 on the road (14-15 on the August calendar)

4 yrs

McGriff's extension, through 2002, \$22.25M in all

.380

Franco's average over the stretch: 38-for-100 with 6 HR

0.90

Hernandez's ERA, with 7 saves and one earned run in 10 innings

5

Straight losses, Aug. 26-30, with 8 runs scored in all

AL EAST STANDINGS

Club	W	L	GB
Toronto	82	55	—
NY Yankees	80	57	2.0
Boston	79	57	2.5
Baltimore	78	59	4.0
Tampa Bay	58	79	24.0

ON THE FIELD

Franco, Judd and McCracken Carry the Bats; Hernandez Is Nearly Perfect

Julio Franco, 40 as of August 23, hit .380 over the stretch — 38-for-100 with six home runs, 24 runs scored and a .446 on-base percentage — and moved his season line to .303/.386. Harry Judd hit .339 (37-for-109) with five homers, 20 RBI and seven steals, and now sits at .285 with 14 home runs and 60 RBI. Quinton McCracken hit .316, Russ Morman .317 in part-time work, and Trammell .348 before his injury.

The cold side was Paul Sorrento, who hit .188 though five of his 13 hits left the park; Miguel Romero, 20, at .191 after an August 8 injury scare that kept him on the roster; and Kevin Stocker, who hit .273 but sits at .180 for the year. Scott McClain hit .253 at third, with 15 walks that lifted his on-base to .351.

The rotation was better than the record. Arjojo went 3–0, Coles 3–2 (3.86 ERA, 27

strikeouts in 37⅓ innings; 11–10 on the year) and Alvarez 4–2 over seven starts with 31 strikeouts. Springer went 2–3 and stands at 8–13, 5.03, so his long-threatened designation for assignment has now gone six pulls without happening. Jason Johnson went 1–3 and allowed 10 home runs in six starts. In the pen, Hernandez saved seven games and gave up one earned run in ten innings; Mecir (6.52) and Adelstein (8.31) were the weak links.

Hernandez allowed one earned run in ten innings. The club still went 15–15.

THE AUGUST LEDGER

DATE	MOVE	DETAIL
Aug 2	Signed	RP Jimmy Hamilton, CF Chris Stahl, C Kevin Kellner and 2B Bryant Powers to minor-league contracts as captain candidates.
Aug 4	Extension	1B Fred McGriff (34) signed through 2002, four years and \$22.25M in all.
Aug 12	Signed	SP Kenny Rayborn, 2B Jose Macias, LF Justin Shepard, SP Kyle Becker and 1B Nate Bellus to minor-league contracts, again as captain candidates; nine signed in the month.
Aug 12	Roster	LHP Danny Quinones called up from Durham; RHP Esteban Yan (6.87 ERA) optioned to Durham; LF Carson Miller recalled to the bench.
Aug 16	DL	RF Bubba Trammell placed on the DL; back around September 21. Waiver-wire candidate Danny Ortega was reviewed and passed on.
Sep 1	Rosters	Expansion to 40 takes effect. No trades or free-agent signings were made after the July 31 deadline.

STATE OF THE CLUB

Rotation: Alvarez, Coles, Arjojo, Johnson and Springer; Saunders is out for the season.

Bullpen: Hernandez closes; Lopez, Carlson and Mecir share the middle innings.

Lineup: McGriff, Franco and Judd lead; Trammell on the DL until about Sep 21.

Schedule: 25 left — three at Minnesota, then Oakland and Seattle, and the Yankees to close.

DOWN ON THE FARM & THE AWARDS SHELF

The August Farm System Review (Vol. 1, No. 5) tracks 112 players across the six affiliates and flags 14 promotions and seven demotions. Taylor Price of Wappingers Falls was named New York–Penn League Batter of the Month for both July and August; he hit .448 in August and is at .397/.485/.647 with five home runs on the year. Teammate Chris Smith (four home runs in August) won a weekly award on the 17th, as did Orlando's Aubrey Huff on the 10th.

Mihnea Piersic hit six home runs in August and has 22 on the year at .319/.408/.598 across three levels. Eric Wicklund, still the lone 80-POT arm in the system, posted a 3.45 ERA with 28 strikeouts in 31⅓ innings at Princeton, and five Princeton players — Kennedy, Gearhart, Bradshaw, Nelson and Polites — made the league All-Star team on August 3. The org's captain chart still has two openings, at Durham and Princeton, which is what the nine signings are meant to fix.

At the big-league level the Rays took no monthly awards. July's AL winners were Manny Ramirez (Batter) and Orlando Hernandez (Pitcher and Rookie); August's, announced today, went to Nomar Garciaparra, Cleveland's Mike Jackson and Oakland's Eric Chavez. The club's only monthly honors this year remain Trammell's April and Jason Johnson's June Rookie of the Month, and no Ray won a weekly award in August. The amateur draft still sits at November 10, with the pool published October 11.